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ABSTRACT

This paper documents American discrimination against Chinese and Japanese groups from the 1850s through the 1940s. Social prejudice against these groups began in the late 19th century when the demand for Chinese labor in California lessened but the immigrants remained and were seen as a threat to American laborers. Japanese immigrants who were successful in small farming were seen to be a source of economic competition. Segregation in schools and legal abuse of Asians ensued. Press statements and other media contributed to prevailing stereotypes. American-born children of Asian parents suffered double problems of racism and acculturation. The publishing industry conformed to local prejudices in order to sell textbooks; thus, American public education did not help to correct misinformed discrimination. Many readers and teacher's manuals omitted the existence of other cultures in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Anglo-American values were stressed. History books skimmed Japanese and Chinese history and avoided the topic of immigration. Geography texts gave inaccurate descriptions of China and were more favorable toward, but patronized, Japan. This narrow, ethnocentric approach prevailed in curricula used until the 1940s. (AV)

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ASIAN-AMERICANS: THEN, NOW, AND TOMORROW

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It has been generally assumed that the schools played a significant role in acculturating the immigrants-"melting down" their differences, and that the schools provided the means for the acceptable rapid social mobility of immigrant children. In reality, only a few ethnic groups achieved fairly rapid social and economic advancement. Most dramatic was the progress of the Asians--the Chinese and the Japanese. Other Asians have not achieved as rapid a success as the Chinese and Japanese have. These two groups were the most disliked and maltreated of the immigrant groups.

The Chinese, initially had been welcomed as a source of cheap and much needed labor, but as the demand lessened for their services, the Chinese came to be despised as the root of all the problems which enveloped California during the 1870's. Chinese coolies had played a very large role in the development of the American West. They cleared the forests, drained the marshes, and worked in the mines. They were part of the crews who built the roads and grading and certainly composed the largest part of the laborers who constructed the Transcontinental railroads. But the Chinese were, without doubt the worst and most unfairly treated of all the immigrants to the United States.

As early as the 1850's in the state of California the Chinese were faced with discriminatory tax laws; they were not allowed to testify in court; nor could they hope to become citizens. They were attacked, robbed, lynched-and rarely were their complaints heard or was justice done. Agitation was kept at a fever pitch by Denis Kearney and his labor party. Labor groups whose anxieties were whetted by demagoguery and hard times began to insist that the

Chinese must leave. Congress responded to the noisy demands of the westerners and the pressure of eastern labor by passing a bill restricting the entry of Chinese laborers, and a later bill excluded Chinese laborers permanently. The Chinese found almost all jobs barred to them: mining, railroad-all jobs save domestic labor which the shortage of women on the frontier had ma e available. They opened laundries and restaurants, which required little capital or skill. They worked long, hard hours, and being very frugal in their life-style, gradually they were able to permit their children to gain an education and higher status as the animus against them eased.[1]

As Chinese immigration ceased, a new wave of Asians came to the western shores, the Japanese. American prejudice was transferred to this group. The Japanese, unlike the Chinese did not depress wages and were not seen as a threat to labor. They were too successful in small farming, where they were most efficient and diligent. This fact aroused feelings of hostility toward them. As these feelings increased among Californians and other westerners, they were expressed in the segregation of a mere one hundred Japanese students in the schools of San Francisco, the passage of laws preventing the Japanese from owning land, and attempts to bar Japanese immigration, culminating in the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907. Anger against the Asians was based on the fear of economic competition and racism. The Asians were thus persecuted, discriminated against, and subjected to legal abuse.

Press statements and other media contributed also to the prevailing stereotypes. The Chinese were accused of being dishonest and unreliable, of indulging in opium smoking, gambling, and prostitution, and finally that their racial characteristics made

assimilation impossible "...They (Chinese) are so degraded that they can live on almost nothing and underbid our own flesh and blood in the labor market. The people of California cannot endure it."[2] The Montana Post characterized the Chinese as "so many vampires sucking the life blood out of any portion in which they remain..."[3] The western press in general expressed the belief that the Chinese were mysterious, with different racial characteristics that made them incapable of relinquishing old customs and habits that prevented them from progressing or assimilating, and these sentiments were echoed by the eastern papers. The New York Times (March 6, 1882) claimed: "I do not see how any thoughtful lover of his country can countenance this Mongolian invasion, involving as it does the subversion of our civilization."[4] The media also enthusiastically supported the exclusion laws. "The American form of government is unsuitable to handle the Chinese criminal classes..."[5] Senator Boies (of Pennsylvania) declared that demagoguery had nothing to do with the debate: "Economic principles are involved which are of the highest order of importance and affect not only the prosperity of the individual, but the welfare of the state."[6]

Different, but equally pernicious statements were stridently proclaimed about the Japanese. The emergence of Japan as a great power also exacerbated the hostility. Homer Lea was the best known and the most eloquent writer on this theme. He felt that the Anglo-Saxon race was the most qualified to rule the world. Our mission was threatened by the Japanese. In 1909, he published a book entitled The Valor of Ignorance in which he predicted the Japanese conquest and occupation of the West Coast. This feat would be aided by the constant stream of immigration that would weaken the American race.[7] This idea was echoed by another

scholar (McClatchy) who in the most serious tone argued that the Japanese could not assimilate or become citizens because their racial inheritance and religion prevented it.[8]

Opposition to the Japanese were expressed in a series of emotionally charged articles in the San Francisco Chronicle in February, 1905. The Japanese were accused of being criminals, menaces to American women, and of course, all were spies![9] In 1920, in a hearing before the Senate Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Senator Phelan declared that the "Japanese are an immoral people (who will steer) California toward mongrelization and degeneracy.[10] At the same time, Wallace Irwin's novel Seed of the Sun was popularized in serial form in the Saturday Evening Post. The plot warned that the Japanese were buying land on the West Coast as part of a conspiracy to aid the Mikado in his bid to rule the world.[11]

The press played an important role in the shaping of the attitudes of much of the population. However, opinions, whether positive or negative, are learned in a variety of settings and in a variety of ways. The receptivity of the public to what they read or heard had developed earlier. There had to be a nourishing soil in which anti-Asian feelings could grow and flourish. The soil came from the home, a little later, from the school. Thus attitudes and opinions were created in this nation that led to the passage of discriminatory laws against Asians. One of these laws made the Chinese and Japanese "ineligible for citizenship." This law included those from Korea, Burma, Malaya, Polynesia, and Tahiti. A tragic dilemma was created for their children by the fact that they were citizens by birth but beset by the problems of

overt racism as well as that of acculturation. They could never be perceived wholly as either Asians or Americans!

Students interviewed in California in the 1920's sadly related some of their conflicts. One girl complained:..."In ancestry and in physical appearance we are Japanese, while in birth, in education, in ideals and in ways of thinking we are American. Nevertheless, the older Japanese will not accept us into their groups because, as they see us, we are too independent, too pert, too self-confident, and the Americans bar us from their group because we retain the yellow skin and the flat nose of the Oriental..."[12] Another student replied to the question in the same way: "In language, in customs, in everything, I was American. But America wouldn't have me. She wouldn't recognize me in high school, she put the picture of those of my race at the tail end of the year book.[13]" These youngsters remained in limbo straddling diverse cultures, never fully accepted by either one!

Very often separate elementary schools were established for Asian children who were later integrated in junior and senior high schools. This often made academic adjustments difficult; yet despite all the economic and social problems, Chinese and Japanese children both attended and remained in school.

The Chinese and Japanese tried to keep their children close to their heritage through culutrally centered classes in the afternoons after public school classes closed. They shared a tradition of books and learning as well as an orientation toward the future. These efforts, attitudes, and values were reflected in their children's positive attitudes toward schools, learning, and achievement.

Asian children in the public schools were subjected to books and teaching that was basically prejudiced: which neither understood nor appreciated the cultural heritage or values of the Asian communities. Teachers were not well trained. They rarely attended college, generally they were high school graduates, with some substitute teaching experience. City schools tended to have more normal school trained teachers, while rural districts used less qualified instructors. Schools of the time were neither inspiring nor hopeful. Rural schools were in bad shape physically. They were ungraded, and badly taught by inadequately-prepared teachers. Recitations continued for ten minutes per class, and teachers continued the same drills in the same old textbooks that had been used by their parents. The city schools were not much better. They were faced with constantly increasing numbers in buildings that were poorly lighted, poorly heated, overcrowded and unsanitary. Classroom numbers were up to 70 or 80, and corruption, already a part of the political system pervaded the educational establishment.

The publishing industry, like its counterparts in other fields, had become great national businesses. As agents and salesmen discovered new lucrative markets they had to learn to pander not only to the interests of politicians who influenced school boards, but they also had to conform to local prejudices, tastes, and desires, if they were to convince the local authorities to purchase their wares. The result was that all textbook writers began to avoid any references that could be construed as controversial. The end products tended to become bland, homogenous works. Having to placate as many pressure groups as possible, and to please as wide a variety of the school boards and officials, writers often avoided issues that were too contemporary. Authors had to be careful in

their treatment of matters that had received approbation of the community. In no way, either then or now could text authors challenge the laws of the land or the accepted and established attitudes of the community. Considering this factor, an examination of textbooks' attitudes toward Asians revealed that frequently these topics were avoided. Many authors fearful of unfavorable reactions hesitated to say much about those topics which were too timely such as the Gentlemen's Agreement, immigration laws, etc.

An analysis of the readers and the examination of the teachers' manuals and supplementary books assigned in the various classes led us to conclude that the reading programs, in general, omitted the existence of other cultures not only in the United States, but also those existing in Europe and Asia. Illustrations consisted of lovely blue-eyed boys and girls, playing or living in rural and suburban middle class homes. The only mention of the Japanese or the Chinese was in the rare myth that accentuated the quaint and the strange. Indeed the salient fact is that all readers emphasized Anglo-American cultural values to the exclusion of all others. This attitude persisted with minor modifications until the 1940's. American histories spoke very infrequently about either Japan or China. About 20% mentioned either the opening of Japan or the Russo-Japanese War and the Treaty of Portsmouth. On the whole, the treatment was superficial, brief and occasionally objective. History books, therefore, considered Japan of little importance, and noted the opening of Japan by Perry, or the Russo-Japanese war. The small percentage of textbooks which discussed Japan used the narrative to enhance the prestige of the United States. The United States brought Japan into active communication with the world. The

United States was the peace-maker, the arbitrator in the Russo-Japanese War. Japan became a great power because she copied American technological feats.

China was discussed less frequently and even more superficially than Japan. About 14% of the books mentioned the Boxer Rebellion or the Japanese-Chinese War. If one author noted Marco Polo and his contact with a superior inventive culture, another described China after the conquest of Ghengis Khan as "A land of almond eyed, pigtailed people, eager to learn the ways of the westerners, and possessed of certain arts and manufactures unknown to Europe."[14] A few texts noted United States' generosity in donating its indemnity money after the Boxer Rebellion to educate Chinese students in America, while ignoring the active discrimination practiced against their countrymen.[15] Another claimed that this money has the "effect of increasing the friendship of the Chinese for our country," while deliberately ignoring the boycotts and demonstrations of mainland Chinese against our exclusion laws in 1905![16] The Open Door Notes were praised as examples of American power and policy which served the interests of civilization and humanity. History textbooks devoted little space to Asian relations in general and to China least of all. China remained at best on the periphery of American interests, and the Chinese were unimportant in the development of western civilization of which the United States was a part.

Immigration was a subject handled very gingerly by history textbooks. 35% did not mention the subject at all. And Asian immigration when discussed was always treated separately and almost always unfavorably. 22% of the American histories included some mention of Chinese immigration. Of the 22% almost all were highly critical of the Asians or attempted to justify the

discriminatory legislation. Few of the books attempted to be neutral or even objective. None defended the Asians! Less space was spent on the Japanese immigrants, their privations and problems.

Almost none of the authors gave any credit or even mentioned the Chinese contributions to America. On the contrary the Chinese were portrayed as an undesirable element, and in the most unflattering terms. Restrictive laws which were passed against Chinese immigrants were always defended by the writers. The arguments against the Asians were based on the following principles: they were illiterate; they were not making America a permanent home; they were not able to assimilate and they had a lower standard of living and accepted lower wages. Few American histories were concerned with the Japanese issue because it was a more contemporary issue. Only 11% of the texts mentioned the Japanese. Of the authors who wrote of the Japanese immigration, all condoned the policies of the United States. "Were we to throw open our doors to the unlimited Japanese immigration we should be inviting a far more serious race problem than we now have with the negro and the Indian."[17] Another characterized the Japanese as the "Yellow Peril".[18]

Genuine world histories were difficult to find. What was called world history meant European history only, and that subject was stressed because American institutions were rooted there. Any other cultures did not exist or were merely extensions of European imperialism. "Oriental" history meant the story of the Middle East. China, Japan, East India and Africa were barely mentioned in most narratives. In the few universal histories we found the stories of non-western cultures were handled simplistically, inaccurately, and sometimes with patronizing language. The lack

of interest in nonwestern cultures was further encouraged by the leading educational group: the American Historical Association which suggested curriculums which emphasized European and American only.[19] Therefore, none of the books on "Universal" or European history understood the beauty and majesty of Chinese civilization. In many works, Japan was considered the superior culture, because the values attributed to these Asian societies were based upon how closely they resembled the United States. India existed only as a British colony, exotic perhaps, but with little recognition of the uniqueness of its civilization.

Geographies could not so easily avoid the mention of China, Japan, or other Asians. The continent, after all, could not be expunged from the Atlas. However, Asians were still not treated any more accurately or more adequately than in the other books.

62% of the geographies had unflattering and inaccurate descriptions of China. This was especially true of the books that were published before 1910. All books admitted that Chinese civilization was ancient, but the majority claimed that China was static and archaic. Their superstitions, lack of modernization, and more inhumane customs were given special attention. Some of the descriptions of the accounts of life in China and Japan emphasized the quaint, the exotic, and the terms used to delineate these customs contained such phrases as "odd" food, "peculiar" customs, "barbaric" laws, etc.[20]

Japan, on the other hand, was regarded in more friendly terms. Japan had made the greatest progress in Asia. She was the England of Asia or the Yankee of Asia. The Japanese were admired because they had imitated the West and the United States.

Yet in reference to Japanese home life, or habits it was not unusual to find the same patronizing language: The Japanese sleep on queer beds, "it would amuse you to see the people of Japan eat rice."[21] Phrases like these were hardly conducive to creating respect for cultural differences!

The general impression of schools and teaching in this period was that it was narrow, provincial, and ethnocentric. Changes that were introduced by the progressives were very slow to take effect. Texts written at the end of World War I were still a part of many curricula in the 1940's. Some were reprinted; some were edited and new chapters added to bring the books up to date. Thus in some cases inaccuracies, prejudices, and misinformation were transferred to more than one generation. The sad effect of these inadequacies were revealed in a study made in 1958. One hundred eighty one persons who were highly educated and articulate were interviewed and were asked their impressions of China. This study made by Harold Issacs revealed that few remembered learning much about Asia in school, and what they recalled were exactly the few paragraphs which we have already discussed.[22] Prejudice cannot be the responsibility of the schools alone, but generations of children were educated with little appreciation of Japan's or China's intrinsic cultural values, and with no respect at all for the Japanese and Chinese immigrants and their contributions to the United States.

Footnotes:

[1] S.W. Kung, The Chinese in American Life (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1962), pp. 55-60; H.B. Melendy, The Oriental Americans (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1972), p. 27.

[2] Marin Journal, April 13, 1876, cited in Elmer C. Sandmeyer, The Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1939), p. 38.

[3] Larry D. Quinn, "Chink, Chink, Chinamen," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, 57, no. 2 (April, 1967) , 83, 86.

[4] Stuart C. Miller, The Unwelcome Immigrant (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1969) , pp. 191-92.

[5] J.E. Bennett, "Chinese Tong War in San Francisco," Harper's Weekly, 64 (1900), 947.

[6] Boies Penrose, "Chinese Exclusion and the Problem of Immigration," Independent, 54 (January 2, 1902) , 12-15; c.f. Alvan F. Sanborn, "The New Immigration to America," Independent, 54 (November 13, 1902).

[7] John Higham, Strangers in the Land (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1955 p. 172; c.f. Clare Booth, "Ever Hear of Homer Lea," Saturday Evening Post, 214 (March 7, March 14, 1942), pp. 12-13; 69-72, 27, 39-42; Homer Lea, The Valor of Ignorance (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1909).

[8] V.S. McClatchy,"Japanese in the Melting-Pot: Can They Assimilate and Make Good Citizens?" Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 93 (January, 1921), 30-31.

[9] Oscar Handlin, Immigration as a Factor in American History (Englewood Cliffs Prentice-Hall, 1959), p. 171; Roger Daniels, The Politics of Prejudice (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962), p. 20; Raymond L. Buell, "The Development of the Anti-Japanese Agitation in the United States," Political Science Quarterly, 37 (December, 1922), 616-17.

[10] Dennis Ogawa, From Japs to Japanese: an Evolution of Japanese-American Stereotypes (Berkeley: McCutchen Publishing Corp., 1971), pp. 12-13.

[11]Ibid., p. 13; Wallace Irwin, Seed of the Sun (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1921).

[12]William C. Smith, The Second Generation Oriental in America (Honolulu: R & E Research Associates, 1927), p. 5.

[13]Ibid., p. 22.

[14]Edwin E. Sparks, The Expansion of the American People (Chicago: Scott, Foreman, and Co., 1900), p. 89.

[15]A. B. Hart, Essentials in American History (New York: American Book Co., 1912), pp. 561-62; Sparks, p. 448; Willis M. West, History of the American People (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1918), pp. 540-41.

[16]Wilbur F. Gordy, A History of the United States for Schools (New York, Scribner's Sons, 1898), p. 398; A. B. Hart, School History of the United States (New York: American Book Co., 1918), p. 376.

[17]Henry W. Elson, Side-Lights on American History (New York: Macmillan, 1908), p. 408.

[18]Frederic A. Ogg, National Progress, 1907-1917 (New York: Harper, 1918), pp. 207-212.

[19]Committee of Seven. The Study of History in Schools: Report to the American Historical Association (New York: Macmillian, 1899), pp. 163-69.

[20]Edward Van Dyke Robinson, Commercial Geography (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1910), pp. 310-323; Charles Morris, Home Life in All Lands, How the World Lives, Book I, 16-28, 82-84, 124-26, 176-77, 180-222; Book II, 70-78, 112, 147-151.

[21]Alexis Everett Frye, Elements of Geography (Boston, Ginn and Co., 1898), p. 156.

[22]Harold R. Isaacs, Scratches on Our Minds (New York: John Day Co., 1958), pp. 92-108.